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SUBJECT: STAFFDEL GROVE MEETINGS IN BOGOTA

Summary

¶11. (U) Congressional aides Paul Grove and Thomas Hawkins met with Peace Commissioner Luis Carlos Restrepo on August 30 and representatives of several human rights organizations on August 31 to discuss the paramilitary demobilization process and the Law of Justice and Peace. Restrepo explained the status of demobilizations, requested resources for GOC's security enhancement, and answered questions regarding the reinsertion of former combatants. The majority of the human rights groups expressed their concern with both the demobilization process and the law, stating paramilitary structures were not being dismantled, the judicial system did not have enough time to investigate cases, and paramilitaries remained in control of several cities in the country. End summary.

Restrepo Meeting

¶12. (U) On August 30, Peace Commissioner Luis Carlos Restrepo met with Paul Grove and Thomas Hawkins to explain the status of demobilizations, request resources for the GOC's security enhancement, and answer questions regarding the reinsertion of former combatants. Restrepo explained that despite previous peace efforts during the past 20 years, no other government has attacked the paramilitaries like this one. In 2000, no casualties were reported, but since the Uribe administration, 1,450 paramilitaries have been killed and 5,000 are in jail. Under this pressure to talk, the United Self-Defense Groups of Colombia (AUC) agreed in 2003 to begin to demobilize. To date, more than half of the former combatants have demobilized (over 10,000 paramilitaries). The GOC has also created a legal framework to go after the most atrocious offenders and for reparations of victims that no other peace process in the world has ever had, he said.

¶13. (U) Restrepo stressed that one of the GOC's biggest concerns is being able to fill the security void left behind by the demobilized paramilitaries to prevent the guerrillas from seizing control of these areas and the drug trade. He recognized that the GOC currently lacks the resources to guarantee the necessary protection to its citizens. The GOC estimates that it needs an additional 10,000 to 15,000 police officers for these efforts. He stated that this force would require a minimum of six months training and it would cost approximately USD 150 million a year. The GOC is calling for assistance from the international community. He reiterated how U.S. support has been decisive in helping the GOC fight the guerrillas and demobilize the paramilitaries, and he hoped for additional support.

¶14. (U) Staffers expressed concern with the government's limited efforts to offer employment opportunities for the demobilized. Restrepo stated that the GOC is giving each former combatant the opportunity to receive free education and training. The GOC is also sponsoring alternative programs to assist demobilized paramilitaries to begin their own business.

NGO Meeting

¶15. (U) Grove and Hawkins met with representatives of five well-respected human rights organizations on August 31. Participants included Mario Gomez, Director of the Restrepo Barco Foundation; Soraya Gutierrez, President of the Lawyer's Collective ("Colectivo de Abogados"); Gloria Florez, Director of MINGA; Gustavo Gallon, Director of the Colombian Commission of Jurists; and Agustin Jimenez, Director of the Committee for Solidarity with Political Prisoners. The discussion focused on the paramilitary demobilization process and the Justice and Peace law.

¶16. (U) The majority of the participants agreed that the Justice and Peace law is weak. Jimenez noted that the law does not allow for the dismantling of paramilitary structures. He added that there is no mechanism to determine who is supporting the paramilitaries, either politically or

financially. Gutierrez and Florez both remarked that some cities and regions continue to be controlled by the paramilitaries, such as in Catatumbo and Cucuta (Norte de Santander department), where paramilitaries and their supporters are involved in local politics and have infiltrated key institutions. The Ambassador noted that the situations in Catatumbo and Cucuta were of concern, but added that a benefit of the demobilization process is finding out who the paramilitaries are, as they sign a statement acknowledging their participation in the illegal group.

17. (U) Gallon said three former presidents -- Alfonso Lopez Michelson, Cesar Gaviria, and Andres Pastrana -- have all voiced concerns with the process, and the Colombian Commission of Jurists (CCJ) agrees with their assessment. A well-done demobilization could have positive effects, but, according to Gallon, this process would not. He added that violations of the cease-fire continue to exist, and the government has not reacted to them. Gallon also voiced his concerns regarding the 60-day timeframe prosecutors have to investigate cases, stating it was not enough time to investigate the multitude of cases each prosecutor would have. Regarding victims' issues, Gutierrez noted the high number of paramilitary victims in Colombia, but low number of prosecutions and convictions. She added that the law does not provide for truth, justice or reparations, that confession is not required, and victims' rights are only considered at the very end of the process. Jimenez said that one could not sacrifice justice for peace, as it will weaken Colombian society.

18. (U) Mario Gomez disagreed with his colleagues and said the law is a good step in working towards peace in Colombia. Although it is not perfect, the law is necessary and his foundation will continue to support the process. He underscored that the law would be used in any future peace processes with the guerrilla groups as well.

DRUCKER